



WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH IN WYOMING

*From The
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health*



State Profile 2002

*Delivering on the Nation's promise:
Safety and health at work for all people through prevention.*

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

NIOSH is the primary federal agency responsible for conducting research and making recommendations for the prevention of work-related illness and injury. NIOSH is located in the Department of Health and Human Services in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The NIOSH mission is to provide national and world leadership to prevent work-related illness, injury, disability, and death by gathering information, conducting scientific research, and translating the knowledge gained into products and services. As part of its mission, NIOSH supports programs in every state to improve the health and safety of workers. NIOSH has developed this document to highlight recent NIOSH programs important to workers and employers in Wyoming.

The Burden of Occupational Illness and Injury in Wyoming

- In Wyoming, there are approximately 257,000 individuals employed in the workforce.¹
- In 2000, 36 workers died as a result of workplace injuries.²
- The mining industry had the highest number of fatalities, followed second by transportation and public utilities, and third by services.²
- In 1999, the most recent year for which data are available, the rate of fatal workplace injuries was 12 deaths per 100,000 workers – above the national average rate of 4.5 deaths per 100,000 workers.²

The Cost of Occupational Injury and Illness in Wyoming

In 2000, the most recent year for which data are available, a total of \$46.4 million was paid for workers' compensation claims by Wyoming private insurers and state funds.³ This figure does not include compensation paid to workers employed by the federal government and also underestimates the total financial burden for private sector businesses, since only a fraction of health care costs and earnings lost through work injuries and illnesses is covered by workers' compensation. Chronic occupational illnesses like cancer are substantially under-reported in workers' compensation systems because work-relatedness is often difficult to establish.

How NIOSH Prevents Worker Injuries and Diseases in Wyoming

Health Hazard Evaluations (HHEs) and Technical Assistance

NIOSH evaluates workplace hazards and recommends solutions when requested by employers, workers, or state or federal agencies. Since 1993, NIOSH has responded to nine requests for HHEs in Wyoming in a variety of industrial settings, including the following example:

Rawlins, Wyoming: Investigation of Airborne Exposure to Printing Solvents

In 2000, NIOSH responded to a request to evaluate worker exposure to printing solvents while using a screen printing process to produce highway signs at the Bureau of Land Management in Rawlins, Wyoming. NIOSH investigators concluded that there was no hazard from airborne exposure to printing solvents among the printer, assistant, or other employees in the building. NIOSH recommended keeping the office windows closed while signs are being printed to prevent odors emitted from the print room exhaust fan from entering the office.

Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Investigations

NIOSH developed the FACE program to identify work situations with a high risk of fatality and to formulate and disseminate prevention strategies. The following FACE investigation was conducted in Wyoming:

Wyoming: Signal Maintainer Struck by Train

A 36-year-old male signal maintainer died when he was struck by a moving train while working on a track-side signal. The victim, wearing heavy headgear, had his back to the approaching train and had not activated the emergency beacon to warn oncoming trains of his presence. FACE investigators concluded that to minimize the potential for similar incidents employers should: ensure employees comply with regulations to stay clear of tracks; issue bright-colored clothing to signal maintainers so that they are readily visible from a distance; and ensure that workers comply with the use of emergency beacons when working on tracks.

Building State Capacity

NIOSH funds the Adult Blood Lead Epidemiology and Surveillance Program (ABLES) in the Wyoming Department of Health. Through ABLES, the agency's staff track and respond to cases of excessive lead exposure in adults which can cause a variety of adverse health outcomes such as kidney or nervous system damage and potential infertility.

Extramural Programs Funded by NIOSH

The following is an example of recent research grants or cooperative agreements funded by NIOSH in the state of Wyoming.

Floor Slope Effects on Lifting

The long-term objective of this research program by the University of Wyoming and NIOSH is to develop guidelines for lifting an object from an inclined floor surface in order to reduce the risk of low back pain and injury at the workplace. Efforts will be made to quantify the kinematics of lifting as well as the loading on the low back in order to understand how different lifting conditions affect a person's risk of injury.

Additional information regarding NIOSH services and activities can be accessed through the NIOSH home page at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/homepage.html> or by calling the NIOSH 800-number at 1-800-356-NIOSH (1-800-356-4674).

¹U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Current Population Survey, 2000.

²DOL, BLS in cooperation with state and federal agencies, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 1999-2000.

³National Academy of Social Insurance, *Workers' Compensation: Benefits, Coverage, and Costs, 2000 New Estimates*, May 2002.